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ABSTRACT

The Chicago (Illinois) School Reform Act was signed into law in 1988 and the Reform School Board of Trustees was appointed in July 1995. There have been several reports of teachers' opinions about the Reform Act, but the opinions of teachers about the Reform School Board have not been studied. Almost half of teachers have reported at least some positive change in their schools, and only 15% believe that schools have changed for the worse. Research has indicated, however, that the reform has had little actual effect on student achievement. With these research findings as background, an instrument was developed to measure the attitudes of teachers toward the Reform School Board of Trustees. One hundred teachers from six elementary schools were surveyed. Sixty-one percent of these teachers felt that they were not involved with reform since the appointment of the Reform School Board. They were nearly equally divided about student improvement in reading, and only somewhat more positive about achievement in mathematics, with 59% believing improvement has occurred. Teachers were opposed to merit pay (68% to 32%), but they favored the Reform School Board's promise of a return to a system-wide curriculum. Results suggest the necessity of more detailed studies of the progress of the Reform School Board. (Contains 1 table and 12 references.) (SLD)

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ED 398 332

Thomas E. Hogueisson

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS OPINIONS OF THE REFORM SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

Ignoring educational problems elsewhere throughout the state, the Illinois General Assembly took aim at Chicago schools during the Spring 1995 Session and passes legislation that will have dramatic effects on school personnel for several years to come. Designed by Gov. Jim Edgar, the sweeping changes quickly were embraced by Republican leaders in both the House and Senate. The bill gained approval of 177 legislator largely along party lines. The Amendatory Act HB206 had the following provisions. It rescinds the right to strike for 18 months, Provides no new money, Funnels all of pension tax levy into general fund, removes job protection for "reserve" teachers, eliminates dismissal procedures for PSRP's, Eliminates class size from contract, Allows principals to fire staff without regards to seniority, and limits bargaining to pay and benefits. With a School Board appointed by and accountable to Mayor Daley, The Reform School Board of Trustees passes policies with substantially the same language as in the previous contract. The agreement provided labor peace and cooperation between the city and the Chicago Teachers Union.

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In March 1996 the Reform School Board of trustees announced a series of educational strategies to improve student achievement and bolster accountability. Key system wide components of the plan include (1) Common curriculum and instruction standards. (2) revisions if graduation requirements and bridge programs in 3rd, 6th and 8th grades. (3) More instructional time in the classroom. (4) Shorter school improvement plans. (5) Teachers and principal academies for upgrading skills. (6) Expanded summer and after-school programs. (7) Art, Music, and physical education. (8) A tutoring initiative. (9) A crackdown on truancy. (10) Special academies for freshman to ease the transition into high school. (11) An expanded teacher recruitment program. and (12) Elimination of BRAACS(20th day closing)

The Chicago School Reform Act was signed into law on December 12, 1988. The Reform School Board of Trustees was appointed in July 1995. While there have been several reports on Teacher Opinion of the Reform Act. None yet exist for the Reform School Board. School Reform in Chicago is on going and changing . One of the constants is the Teacher. What is the role of the professional educator in Reform? Most importantly what are teachers' opinion about reform. The constituency that was perhaps. most ignored in the development of the first 2 years of the Chicago school reform effort is the group that has been the focus of other school-based management experiments across the country--the teachers.(Hess 1995). Though it is quite apparent that few significant changes could be expected to happen in Chicago's classroom without the active involvement of the teachers, they had been far less the focus of activities in this city's reform efforts. It appears that teachers have been involve quite actively with reform since it's beginning.

In a survey conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. In 1994, "Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock"(Sebring,Byrk,Easton,et.al.,) Teachers and students in 266 elementary and 46 high schools took part in the survey. In all, 6,200 elementary school teachers, 2,600 high school teachers, and 39,000 6th-,8th-,and 10th-grade students completed surveys. The report was organized around six topics:

> (1) Teachers' assessment of school changes since reform and the role reform played in those changes; (2) Effectiveness of school leadership, including Local School Councils (LSC's), principals, and faculty; (3) Parents' involvement in students' learning and with the school; (4) Professional community and work orientation among the faculty; (5)Program coherence across the school; and (6) The progress of reform in different elementary school communities.

Teacher involvement is essential to successful school reform. Almost half of the teacher report at least some positive change in their schools; a little over one-third of the teachers register little change, and 15 percent believe things have changed for the worse. Teachers are most positive about their own teaching effectiveness, professional opportunities, and commitment. Over 70 percent of the teachers surveyed said their teaching effectiveness has improved in the past three years, compared to only five percent who say that it has gotten worse. Fifty-seven percent say their professional growth opportunities are better than before, while only seven percent say they are worse. Over half say their commitment to the school has increased. While teacher provide optimistic views of changes in their own teaching, they are not as positive about changes in student behavior and performance.

By almost two to one, more teachers say that students behavior has deteriorated in the past three years(42 percent) than say it has improved(23 percent). Similarly, only a third of the teachers see improvements in the quality of students' academic performance. the majority of teachers report no change in teacher-student, parent-teacher, and student-student relations. Their are many positive reports from teachers about recent changes, the primary relation among teachers, students, and parents that support student learning have been less affected.

On the subject of reform, 45 percent indicate positive impact; about 35 percent suggest no impact, and 20 percent register negative impact. In general, teachers are more optimistic about the school-community relations and the educational program than other aspects of the school.. Forty-three percent of the teacher say that reform has had a positive effect on school relations with the community, compared to 10 percent who say that it has had a negative effect. Teachers note the positive effect of school reform on professional development (39 percent) and curriculum (37 percent). The areas where reform has had the least impact are student behavior and relationship between teachers and students, student and student, and parents and teachers.

On School Leadership, teacher were less enthusiastic about their own influence in school governance. Over half claim that teachers in their school have extensive or moderate influence in school affairs. These teachers indicate they choose instructional materials and have some influence on hiring and budget. Somewhat less than half judge teachers as having limited or minimal influence. Seventy percent agree or strongly agree that the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) take an active role in school planning; over sixty percent agree that the PPAC advises the LSC about curriculum.

As in previous studies, reform is progressing better in small schools. However, small size is not a cure all; some small schools are just as bad as any large school.

Hess(1995) reported that there is little hope that student achievement will rise in urban schools unless the basic interaction between teacher and students changes. One of the fundamental premises of the authors of the Chicago School Reform act was that no one "silver bullet" existed to change the relationship between teachers and students in Chicago. Instead, the philosophy was more "Let 1,000 flowers bloom." It can be safely said that this reform effort has produced unprecedented change in Chicago schools. Not all schools have changed. Some have change for the worse. But in many more schools, creative change has been happening. The full effects on those changes on students achievement cannot yet be determined. Advocated claim that test scores are going up (Design for Change,1993). Detractors have claimed that they are going down(Polsby,1993). Long-term effects are still not known. Given the pace of change in the city's schools and the chronic political games in Springfield it is not surprising that trends in students achievement are not yet clear.

Vander Weele (1994) reports on the Reform effort as a radical experiment in decentralization. Half of the 411,000 children in the Chicago public schools never graduate and tens of thousands receive diplomas even though they are scarcely able to read, write, or compute. Recognition of the deplorable shape of the city's schools led to the reform efforts that resulted in the creation of LSC's composed primarily of parents. While other school system have attempted reform on a large scale, none has attempted to decentralize as thoroughly or as rapidly as has Chicago. The history of reform is traced, and some solution are offered to the problem facing the Chicago Schools.

(1) Teacher training and recruitment. When one third of elementary school principals say that no more than half their teachers have a good grasp of reading and language arts while seventy percent lack proper science skills, something is terribly wrong. Even if such statement are incorrect, as the teachers union claims, the fact remains that the average age of a Chicago public school teacher in 1993 was forty-seven years old. No matter how competent, any teacher who has been away from higher education for twenty-five years or more would likely benefit from additional training. One type of training could be "master teachers." To attract individuals with proper credentials, these teacher could be offered higher salaries. How serious is the problem of poorly performing teachers in Chicago public schools? Abysmal test scores may be one indicator. Citing the above study by the Consortium nine out of ten teachers questioned are confident in their ability teach basic subjects. Instead, they blame an inadequate home and community environment for low student achievement.

Walberg's and Niemiec' report in 1994 found that on the three outcomes specified in the reform legislation, the Chicago schools have shown no improvement. The intent of the reform legislation was explicit: to raise achievement, attendance, and graduation rates to national norms within five years. They examined the outcome specified in the legislation, together with perceptions of teacher, principals, and council members. The results were:

(1) Students achievement. The scores have declined. The reform effort has not been successful in raising student achievement.

(2) Student attendance. There is very little variation from year to year. The reform have apparently succeeded increasing student attendance.

(3) Graduation and dropout rates. The rate remain above fifty percent. In the three years since the reform legislation 162,750 students have dropped out.

Thus, on three outcomes specified in the reform legislation the Chicago public schools have shown no improvement. He cites the Consortium survey and its report on teacher opinions. Despite the radical reform legislation and the transfer of power to local school councils, there has scarcely been any demonstrable progress on outcomes goals. Chicago schools rank very low by national standards even when compared to other large urban systems. Further radical changes looms. In 1995, after the Republican seized control of both houses of the General Assembly these changes were put into place as the Reform School Board of Trustees.

Byrk,Easton,Kerbow,Rollow,and Sebring (1994) report that for the one-third of the schools that have taken best advantage of the opportunities provided by reform, the job is not done or nearly done. In the end, the key issues is student achievement. While progress is apparent at some schools, in some subject areas, and at some grade levels more improvement system wide must occur. Chicago lack an accountability system for gauging school and student progress. Without quality control it is impossible to report whether students, their families, and the city are ultimately well served by reform. In November 1993 the Consortium Reported in Chicago Elementary School Reform: A Mid-Term Exam that major advances in student learning depended largely on enhanced teacher expertise. Without far greater investment in helping teachers improve their craft, some advances are possible, but big jumps will likely remain elusive. The scale, intensity, and duration of staff development needed greatly exceed current practices. For this to be corrected additional resources will have to be allocated for staff development. Current limits on teachers' time Restructuring schools have relied heavily on teachers' good will to volunteer and have sometimes used discretionary funds for partial remuneration. a more regular means is required. Schools must be seen as learning organizations for both students and adults.

Chicago needs an accountability system for schools and students, an information system to monitor individual school and student improvement. School reform and improvement activities are more likely to be productive in smaller schools. Inadequate funding would have a disastrous effect on these initiatives.

Thomas (1995) sought to determine whether Chicago Public School teachers are more involved in shared decision making since the Reform Act of 1988. Among her finding (1) 53 percent believed that they were more involved since the 1988 reform; (2) 70 percent stated that a collaborative relationship existed between principal and teacher, but teacher generally yielded to the principal's opinion; (3) teachers did not believe that students were improving or that there was more parent involvement;(4) 60 percent of the questioned participated in shared decision making; and (5) 73 percent believed that shared decision making led to innovation or new activities at their schools. Additional research is needed as it related to teacher decision making and student achievement.

Ogletree's and McHenry (1989) surveyed 100 Chicago teachers in 10 schools. The responses indicated that no gains have been made in student achievement, school climate, teacher involvement in decision making, or job satisfaction. Teacher were not optimistic about the LSC's created to decentralize school administration. Most teachers believed that small classes, reduced paper work, more instructional materials, better security, and higher teacher salaries would improve student achievement. They concluded that teacher involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of school-based management reform. Evaluation of the Chicago school reform effort is the purpose of this report. The survey of 100 Chicago teachers in 10 school suggested that teachers do not consider themselves to be an integral part of the school restructuring process. Findings also indicate that unless restructuring efforts actively involve teachers in decision making, the quality of education, student retention and graduation rates, teacher autonomy will not be improved,

In "Charting Reform: The Teacher's Turn" (1991) Study more than 13,000 teachers responded to the survey, a return rate of over 70 percent. The high response rate and the time required to complete the survey (30 to 45 minutes) are indications of how anxious teachers were to have their voices heard. Two years into the reform effort, teachers appeared to be far more involved in school improvement efforts than they had anticipated when reform was being launched. More than half of the respondents (53%) indicated they had been involved in helping to develop the school improvement plan for their schools. More than three-quarters (77%) said they were familiar with the major points of their SIP. More than two-thirds (66%)thought the SIP would help to make their school better over the next five years. Thus, a majority elementary school teacher . there did seems to be a high level of involvement in effort to improve their schools. The report further states that a high number of teachers were optimistic about how well the reform effort was working. More than seventy one percent said that the principal and the LSC were working well together. More than half (57%) that the LSCs respected their views, and that the teacher representatives on the LSCs fairly represented their views (66%). They believed that the PPAC was an important voice for teachers in their schools(68%) and that the PPAC represented their views(77%) and that the PPAC had increased teacher involvement in their schools. There were also some troubling finding in the survey. Teachers reported a serious gap existed in parent-teacher relationship. Teacher felt that their school reached out to parents (78%), but only half (51%) felt supported by parents and only three in five (59%) felt the parents respected teachers. A majority (54%) felt that community members did not make efforts to support their schools.

Population/Sample The population for this study included 100 Chicago public school teachers. The teachers are from 6 elementary schools, 1 school in each region of the city. This study included the available sample of 100 classroom and/or specialists teachers. One hundred usable return were received from the teachers, which represents ten percent of the population sample. Teachers from each of the six schools were included.

Method of Data Collection:

The questionnaire was distributed to the 100 teachers in the six schools. They were asked to indicated their agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the corresponding response. The completed questionnaires were placed in individual envelopes, which were provided, and then placed in a collection envelope in the office of each school.

Instrument:

A self devised instrument called the Hogueisson's Reform School Board of Trustees Questionnaire was used to measure teachers' attitudes towards the Reform School Board of Trustees. There was a total of ten questions with two open ended questions. The instrument was pilot-testes on ten members of a graduate studies class at a state supported university to establish validity and reliability of the instrument.

The results of the questionnaire were then tabulated, the percentages of yes, no, and don't know were analyzed to determine the attitudes of the teachers towards the Reform School Board of Trustees. The Chi Square was used to determine the statistical significance (.05) of the response.

Results:

The data in table one show that sixty one percent of the teachers surveyed felt that they were not involved with reform since the appointment of the Reform School Board. Therefore, the results support the null hypothesis and does not support the research hypotheses that teachers favor the reform school board. The results coincide with the findings of Thomas (1995) and Ogletree and McHenry (1989).

Teacher are equally divided about students improvement in Math and reading. With fifty percent answering that scores have improved in reading and fifty percent saying no improvement. These result align closely with recent IGAP and ITBS test. The opinion for math score was slightly higher fifty nine for improvement and forty one percent against. On the question of students attendance a slight gain with fifty-seven for improvement and forty three against. Again, the Math scores on the IGAP / ITBS test and system-wide reports on attendance echo these findings.

Teachers are opposed to merit pay by sixty eight percent to thirty two percent almost two to one. One of the changes brought on by the Republican take over of the Illinois Legislature. Merit pay still is unpopular with teachers. Teachers remain opposed to merit pay. This shows an increase from Ogletree and McHenry finding in 1990.

On the question about graduation requirement ninety three percent favor the reform school boards changes. The extended school day showed teachers almost evenly divided with fifty three percent for and forty seven percent opposed. Since the start of Reform in Chicago individual schools were to told to develop their own curriculum. With a mobility rate of twenty seven percent, this lead to confusion about the curriculum and standards for each of the 535 schools. The Reform School Board promised a return to system wide curriculum . Ninety two percent of the teachers favored such a return.

The results suggest that additional follow-up research is needed to assess the progress of the Reform School Board. Recommendation for further research: larger sample/population, experimental study, improved research with includes random sampling, and a five year longitudinal study.

Table I
n=100

	Yes	No
1. Do you believe that teachers are more involved in decision making since the Reform School Board of Trustees?	39%	61%
2. Since Chicago School Reform are students improving in Reading?	50%	50%
3. Since Chicago School Reform are students improving in Math?	58%	42%
4. Since Chicago School Reform has attendance improved?	58%	42%
5. Should teachers' salaries be related in part to teachers effectiveness?	32%	*68%
6. Do you favor the revisions in graduation requirements?	*93%	7%
7. Do you favor the extended school day?	42%	58%
8. Do you favor a common, system-wide curriculum and standards?	*92%	8%

* significant at .05 level

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